BEECHEY.

The Life of an Interesting but Neglected Painter.

SIR WILLIAM BEECHEY, R. A. By W. Roberts. Illustrated. 12mo, pp. xiii, 302. Imported by Charles Scribner's Sons.

Those who have a soft place in their hearts for minor things—for minor poetry, minor art and the like—will find much to support their theory of criticism in the history of Sir William Beechey. It effectively illustrates the proposition that a man may not be great, but may still

MRS. SIDDONS.
(From the portrait by Beechey.)

hold his own in the company of greatness. Beechey did this with a confidence and a popularity which could only have been justified by his possession of considerable gifts. The contemporary of Reynolds, Gainsborough and Romney, he never rose in the course of his long career to an eminence quite comparable to that which they enjoyed; yet on his early emergence from obscurity he conquered a sufficiently distinguished position, and steadily thereafter was not only prosperous but fairly celebrated, counting among his sitters members of the royal family and scores of conspicuous figures in English society. Mr. Roberts is not precisely inspired in his biography of the painter, for Beechey was not the man to make a hero for that kind of a book. But in plain, straightforward fashion we have here narrated the salient events in an industrious and fruitful life, and as we follow them we come to feel a new sympathy for an artist hitherto unjustly neglected. Every student of British painting is, of course, familiar with his work, but it needed a sympathetic and tolerably exhaustive monograph to somehow bring the qualities of that work together and reveal them in a clearer light. Mr. Roberts's numerous illustrations form by themselves ingratiating testimony to the interest of Beechey's character as a painter.

He was the son of a man about whom Mr. Roberts tells us nothing beyond the fact that he died when the future painter was still quite young. William was handed over to an uncle, a solicitor or attorney, who destined him for the career of a lawyer, but already the lad had artistic impulses which he strove to gratify despite all disciplinary measures to the contrary. The story of his emancipation, as it was handed down in his family, is summarized by Mr. Roberts in a passage so amusing that we must quote it intact:

> After various reproofs, Beechey's uncle, in despair, took to shutting the boy up in an attic with nothing but his school books until he had mastered his lessons. One day the uncle went up as usual to let the boy out, and found the bird flown. He had escaped by climbing down a pear tree, and in looking out of the window the uncle saw the boy flying across the fields. He set off after him, and on seeing that he was pursued the boy swam across the river, escaped and begged his way to London. Soon after he arrived he passed a carriage painter's establishment and went in to watch. The man seemed to be amused, and asked him what he wanted; he said he wanted to earn some money, and thought he could paint. The good natured man said he should try, and gave him a board and paints and a device to copy; he was so pleased with the result that he finally employed him to assist. He got on so well that he painted the arms, etc., of several great people's carriages; one of them, on hearing it was quite a youth who had painted the panel of his carriage, asked to see him, heard his history and had him taught to paint. While he was still a youth he went with some friends for a holiday into the country, and they decided on a walking tour from London to Norwich. On their way they stopped one night at an inn, and the next day after breakfast discovered that they had no money left. Beechey at once offered to get them out of the dilemma, which he did by offering to replace the very shabby signboard with a brand new one, in discharge of their account. The landlord agreed, and Beechey furnished him with a splendid sign of St. George and the Dragon. In after years Beechey made an attempt to get hold of this early work, but the landlord and the sign had both disappeared.

These were certainly modest beginnings, but Beechey had it in him to make rapid progress. The difficulty of getting on in London did not discourage him, and we soon find him an assiduous and successful student in the school of the Royal Academy. He had good health and a cheerful disposition. Circumstances and his own instinct seem to have caused him to gravitate at once toward portraiture, and, one commission leading to another, it was not long before he was well established in his profession. There is a curious note by George Dawe, in his book on Morland, indicating the manner in which Beechey came to be introduced to his most exalted patrons. "The portrait of a nobleman painted by him being returned by the hanging committee of the Royal Academy so incensed the peer that he had the picture sent on to Buckingham Palace to be inspected by the King and the royal family, who all, in consequence, became sitters to the painter. This was the commencement of his fortunes." King George greatly admired his work, and showed his appreciation not only by employing him but by conferring knighthood upon him. Mr. Roberts tells this anecdote of the King and his painter:

> Sir William used often to sleep at the palace and the King, an early riser, would come into his bedroom before he was up, and say: "What, still in bed, Beechey? Lazy fellow, get up and come out." One day he went into the studio and saw that he had put a tree with autumn tints in the background of a picture of a lady he was painting, and said: "Hullo, Beechey, red trees, *red trees!* No such thing as red trees; don't believe it." So next morning Sir William got up early and cut a bough with very red leaves and hung it on the easel before his majesty came in; when he did come he stared at it, and then said: "Humph! Painted by God, eh? Bad courtier, Beechey; take it out," and of course, he did. His object in painting a red background was that he might put more color in the flesh tints, and he used to declare that there was so much color under the surface that his pictures would outlast those of any painter of his day.

SIR WILLIAM BEECHEY, R. A.
(From the portrait by himself.)

The man so cordially received at court, and thereby made doubly sure of a welcome elsewhere, unquestionably deserved his good fortune, and there are many of his pictures which give this conviction an edge of something like enthusiasm. He painted some delightful studies of childhood, as witness the "Little Mary" which we reproduce. There is charm, too, in his "Mrs. Siddons," and in various other portraits that he made of lovely women. In one picture of his, the "Lady and Child as Cupid," which is believed to have been painted from Lady Beechey and one of their children, he achieves positive felicity. He aimed at honest workmanship and natural resources as well as zealous study carried him far. But it is easily seen why he failed to win the fame granted in such abundant measure to his three most brilliant contemporaries. He lacked the academic strength of Sir Joshua, the sterling draftsmanship, the skill in the handling of draperies, and the sense of composition, which characterize that master. He knew next to nothing of the art of monumental portraiture as Reynolds understood it. In technique he did not even begin to commence to prepare, to use Stevenson's phrase, to touch the supreme authority and true painter's feeling of Gainsborough. He had little of the elegance, the courtly distinction, which belonged to both these artists. Finally, he wanted the suavity and the exquisite personal quality of Romney. What was it then that gave him his vogue and that preserves his work to this day?

George Dawe gives us a hint in his saying that "Beechey may justly be considered the only original painter we have, all the rest being more or less the imitators of Sir Joshua." That overstates the matter, but it is sound in so far as it points to Beechey's originality. His work has an individual savor. It is direct, sincere, and marked by a certain simplicity. He had a flair for character which might, perhaps, have been weakened if he had given over much time to the cultivation of those graces which we miss in his portraits. There is a British genuineness about his art, some feeling for beauty, but a keener feeling for the truth. Genius as Reynolds, Gainsborough and Romney possessed it, was denied him, but his talent was of that high order which is akin to the higher gift. It will make for justice if Mr. Roberts's book brings about a more general recognition of this fact.

HOLDERNESS.

Annals of Colonial New Hampshire.

What is the oldest English inscription on this continent? Mr. George Hodges, the author of a pleasant little book on the beginnings of the New Hampshire town of "Holderness" (Houghton, Mifflin & Co.), tells us that it is one cut on a rock at the Weirs by the Commissioners sent in 1652 by the General Court of Massachusetts to locate the northern boundary of the colony. The initials of the Commissioners—one was that Master Edward Johnson who wrote the history of New England—appear on the top of the rock, while below is the name of the worshipful ruler of the colony, to wit, "Wp John Endicut, Gov." Holderness was a typical colonial town, and its history, as set down by Mr. Hodges, is interesting and occasionally picturesque.

It was named after the Earl of Holderness, who was in 1751 the British Secretary for the Colonies and who is described by Walpole as "a formal piece of dulness." He was, by the way, the father of the unhappy lady who was the first wife of Lord Byron's scampish father, Jack Byron. Mr. Hodges offers some slight but amusing sketches of various early worthies of Holderness. One of these was Samuel Shepard, who was town clerk for forty-one years and who kept an inn which was the social, political and commercial centre of the place and the scene of the town meetings. The quaintest thing about this important personage, who died in 1817, was his total disapproval of the American Revolution. Living and dying as a New Hampshire town official he never relinquished his allegiance to the British crown. He is still dimly remembered, we are told, in his Sunday costume of his wedding coat, "light blue with buff facings, with long tails and flapped pockets surmounting a waistcoat of red plush. In his vast pockets he carried a store of apples for the solace of small boys."

MR. B. SHAW.

A Person "Naturally and Incurably Prolix."

From The London Times.

There are limits to the faculty of attention. This elementary fact is often overlooked by mere writers, who sit solitary in their studies and cannot see their readers yawn. What is odd is that Mr. Shaw should overlook it—Mr. Shaw, who was a speaker before he was a writer, and who ought to know better than any one how little at a time the average audience can stand. One has to conclude that this is a case wherein native temperament has triumphed over training. Mr. Shaw is naturally, and it would seem incurably, prolix. You will find the same characteristic not only in his plays but in his novels, in his reviews, in his letters to the newspapers. He never knows where to stop. It is a well established rule that lecturers who exceed the hour do so at their peril; and "Don Juan in Hell" is really a quartet of lecturers.

LITERARY NOTES.

The pocket edition of a classic has become one of the most popular things in the world of bookmaking. Little, Brown & Co., of Boston, who have had great success with their edition in this form of Miss Wormeley's translation of Balzac, will in the autumn bring out similar editions of Jane Austen, Victor Hugo and the elder Dumas.

We are glad to hear that Mr. George S. Elgood is preparing a book on "Italian Gardens," a book chiefly composed, of course, of drawings by himself, reproduced in color. We have pleasant recollections of his volume on "Some English Gardens."

Mr. Bernard Capes has forsaken the Italian Renaissance temporarily, and the new novel which he is presently to issue will have the London of thirty or forty years ago for its main scene. It is to be called "The Great Skene Mystery," and it is said to be "an unvarnished tale of crime and its retribution." The fiction of the autumn will include a novel called "Vida," by Mr. S. R. Crockett, and a new story by Maarten Maartens, "The New Religion." Mr. W. E. Norris's forthcoming novel bears the suggestive title of "The Square Peg."

The summer number of "The Studio" ought to prove one of the best of the special issues of this periodical. It is devoted to the brothers Maris, James, Matthew and William. Much has been written about these interesting Dutch painters, but a place has been kept waiting for a good popular volume, assembling all the biographical data available, and well illustrated into the bargain.

Every now and then a new effort is made to run down the fugitive writings of Charles Dickens. The latest investigator—and evidently one of the luckiest—is Mr. B. W. Matz, the editor of "The Dickensian." Through an office book recently discovered, which shows the payments made over many years for contributions to "Household Words," he has been able to identify certain stories, sketches and papers in lighter vein which the novelist wrote for that periodical. (Also this book has made it possible to prove that certain articles which experts have attributed to Dickens were really not produced by him.) Mr. Matz has made a selection of the great writer's anonymous contributions to "Household Words," and is now seeing it through the press. It will form part of two volumes devoted to his poems, plays and miscellaneous writings, which are to appear in the new "National Dickens" being issued by Chapman & Hall.

Longmans, Green & Co. will soon have ready, under the title of "Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen," a volume of Civil War reminiscences by Dr. John Eaton. It will include a history of "The Work for the Contrabands and Freedmen of the Mississippi Valley from 1862 to 1865." The author, who writes in collaboration with Ethel Osgood Mason, was at one time General Superintendent of Freedmen in the Department of Tennessee.

That was good news, sent us by our Paris correspondent the other day, to the effect that M. Nicoulaud had decided to give the world another volume of memoirs by the Comtesse de Boigne. It will presumably be put promptly into English and issued here by the Scribners, who brought out the first volume only a fortnight ago. As we showed in reviewing the book,

"LITTLE MARY."
(From the portrait by Beechey.)

this lady enjoyed rare opportunities for observing French society and possessed a gift for amusing gossip thereon.

A rival to Mr. W. W. Jacobs has arisen in Mr. Arthur E. Copping. That, at all events, is the opinion of the English reviewers of his "Glotty and the Guv'nor," a collection of tales about humble British mariners. Those are said to be delightfully humorous, but we must wait until we read them before believing that Mr. Copping can rival Mr. Jacobs. That writer has a charm all his own.

Professor L. E. Robinson, of Monmouth College, and Mr. Irving Moore have prepared "An Illinois Anthology," which R. G. Badger, of Boston, is issuing in a quarto of some five hundred pages, illustrated with portraits. Evident's the atmosphere of Illinois is favorable to the Muse, for there will be over four hundred poems in this book, selected from the works of more than one hundred and sixty authors. We confess with shame that we never dreamed of there being so many poets in the history of Illinois.